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ABSTRACT

The Dallas Independent School District has spent the past several years developing what it terms "a model for shared decision making." This model involves everyone with a direct interest in education -- students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators -- in assessing needs and assigning priorities. This speech focuses on the development of that model, with special emphasis on the administrative component. (Editor)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
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SPEAKER: Nolan Estes, General Superintendent of Schools, Dallas, Texas

TOPIC: HOW CAN WE MAKE THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM CONCEPT COME ALIVE?

PLACE: Room 321-3-5, Civic Auditorium

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"No group has a monopoly on wisdom when it comes to making educational decisions"--for this reason and others, the Dallas (Tex.) Independent School District has spent the past several years developing what it terms "a model for shared decision making." Dallas' model involves everyone with a direct interest in education--students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators--in assessing needs and assigning priorities. Dr. Estes' presentation will focus on the development of this model, with special emphasis on the administrative component.

Following are brief descriptions of the various components of the Dallas Model for Shared Decision Making.

...the District Communications Committee, composed of representatives from all employee groups. The DCC meets on a regular basis to discuss concerns affecting all employees. These cover a wide spectrum ranging from personnel policies such as sick leave and hiring practices to employee benefits, as well as whetever is of concern to personnel. Items which affect only one group can be taken directly to the superintendent after clearing the DCC. Ad hoc committees are appointed as the need arises for in-depth consideration of certain matters, such as hospitalization coverage. For example, last spring an ad hoc committee conducted an information campaign and straw vote on proposed social security coverage for employees.

...the Principals Advisory Committee (PAC), composed of elected principals representing different levels--elementary, middle school, junior high, and high school--meets regularly with the general superintendent to reflect conditions throughout the school district and to make recommendations for improved procedures in administration.

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...the Field Advisory Team (FAT), consisting of administrators from all operational levels who meet when necessary to discuss and provide reactions to key issues and proposals from other employee groups. This team is an excellent source of information on the possible effects of a proposed policy or procedure and greatly aids the decision-making process. Before an item under consideration is tentatively agreed upon, it is useful to have the matter reviewed by team members before approval is given and the item is presented to the Superintendent or the Board of Education.

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...Dallas School Administrators Association (DSAA) is an umbrella group for the administrative team portions of the model. The PAC and FAT are part of the umbrella. A full-time president is housed in the central office where he facilitates communication between all administrators. Actually an administrative ombudsman, the president is a special advisor to the superintendent and serves on the cabinet.

...the superintendent's student advisory committee (SUPERSAC), promotes two-way communication between the students and the administration. Each high school is asked to annually select a junior and senior class member to meet on a monthly basis with the general superintendent. Since its formation three years ago, SUPERSAC has been actively engaged in numerous activities related to curriculum, student affairs, secondary education, desegregation, and even budget development for the District.

...Dallas City Council of PTA's, composed of the president and a representative of each school PTA. The executive committee of the group meets on a regular basis with the superintendent in an effort to provide input and gain information.

...Operation Involvement, a needs assessment and goal setting process involving educators, parents and students. Some 600 persons annually take part in this effort to assist the Board of Education in policy decisions. Participants meet in small groups on a monthly basis, and as a whole several times during the year. Operation Involvement participants are also invited to attend Board of Education budget retreats, and make tours of the schools to help assess the effectiveness of programs underway in the District. Last year, input from Operation Involvement participants resulted in some 100 revisions or additions to proposed district goals for 1972-73. An evaluation of last year's Operation Involvement showed that, almost without exception, participants were enthusiastic and enjoyed "having a piece of the action." The school district benefited immeasureably from the advise and suggestions of participants, and the end result was greater support for the budget proposals.

Dr. Estes believes that the Dallas approach has led to better administrative decisions. "During these times of crisis management," he explains, "it is only through such involvement that management can be improved. I dissent from the idea that administrators, teachers, students, and parents must be adversaries and constantly at war with each other. There must be a better way, and we are trying to find it."

A position paper on the Dallas management team approach, and a rationale for its shared decision-making model, are attached.

Over the past few years, principals and other middle managers have increasingly found themselves as individuals caught-up in the middle. District level controversies, ranging from desegregation and finance to sex education and dress codes, have filtered down to individual schools. These same pressures, in the form of a variety of teacher, student, and parent demands, have also been initiated at the building level.

The result has been, in the opinion of many, the erosion of principal's authority and prerogatives from all sides. Needless to say, this trend has not contributed to good morale among middle managers. In fact, their frustration has been compounded by the salary and benefit gains made by teachers through highly organized associations and unions.

No one should be surprised then that principals and other administrators also want a piece of the action. It is only human nature for a person to want his job role clearly defined, and to be adequately compensated for carrying it out. And that's basically what school middle managers want--a good educational program and a voice in shaping it; appropriate salary and working conditions; and most importantly, recognition for a job that is well done.

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It would be difficult for anyone to disagree with such goals. The real question is, in light of contemporary problems and pressures, what is the best method of achieving them.

For many years, the Dallas School Administrators Association has represented the interests of all administrators--be they assistant principals, principals, supervisors, coordinators, and even line officers. More recently, the DSAA's ability to help its members was increased through the initiation of the District Communications Committee, which includes the opportunity for direct consultation with the Superintendent. But if this approach fails to satisfy the administrator's quest for his goals, must collective bargaining be next? Hopefully not.

Collective bargaining, although it admittedly has some appeal, is surrounded by pitfalls. First, the labor-management model is not consistent with the role of the administrator. If a person has the authority to hire and fire, or recommend such action, he is considered management in the private sector. Why then would school administrators want to consider themselves as labor?

The key liability however, is the rationale of collective bargaining. It assumes a conflict of interest between management and labor, and it expects that their relationship will be in conflict. Such a win-lose syndrome cannot be conducive to

improved education for boys and girls. Adversary relationships can only lead to polarization and further disruptions of the learning process. Such conflict not only weakens the efforts of the system, but does not satisfy the motivation factors related to job satisfaction.

Certainly no DISD administrator could want this to happen in Dallas. To avoid such a disaster, and to move toward the goal of job satisfaction, it is proposed that a "team management" approach be developed.

There has been a great deal of talk about this concept in recent months. The time has come to move from the talking to the action stage. Under a management team system, all "line" administrators, including principals, can be thought of as being extensions of the superintendent with appropriate authority designated in keeping with their assigned duties.

From the viewpoint of the superintendent, his effectiveness would be handicapped seriously if he could not depend upon the loyalty and cooperation of all sub-administrators in the execution of school policies. As an extension of the office of the superintendent, all administrators are an integral part of the final authority of the executive branch of the school system. Within the authority structure, all administrators must be part of the management team and must be held accountable to the

superintendent for their actions. Any disruption in the cooperative relationships between the superintendent and his sub-administrators places a serious handicap on the effective administration of the schools.

The question is not whether there should be a management team; rather, the issue is how it should be organized to maximize its effectiveness.

The crucial factors in implementing a management team concept are: (1) the acceptance by the superintendent of the desirability of involving all sub-administrators in administrative planning and in policy formulation; and (2) the adoption of a structure which assures open communication and shared decision making with all administrators.

Dr. Estes has already indicated his interest through his leadership and pioneering of the concept. The key step at this point then, is to develop a workable mechanism agreeable to everyone involved. There aren't many models to follow, but national leaders have indicated that the most effective structure is an umbrella organization. In this respect, through our experiences with the DSAA, we have a ready made vehicle for the team management approach.

During 1972-73, the DSAA president will be relieved of his regular duties and will devote full time to the organization.

It is proposed that the president, working with and through the superintendent, serve as coordinator of the management team component activities. Such components will include the Principal Advisory Committee (with vacancies being filled by the DSAA president); the Field Advisory Team; the DSAA representatives on the DCC; the DSAA Executive Board; and of course, all DSAA members (which hopefully will include all administrators).

The DSAA president, with an office in the central administration building, will work closely with each of these groups--keeping DSAA members informed of all activities and collecting feedback for input at the appropriate level. When necessary to consult with the superintendent, the DSAA president will be joined by the PAC and FAT chairmen, the DCC representatives, and the DSAA Executive Board.

Through such an arrangement, it is hoped that an effective management team approach can be developed. The DSAA has always been an organization composed of all DISD administrators, and dedicated to the best interests of the Board of Education, administration, and the District as a whole. This will continue to be the goal.

Let there be no misunderstanding--the future patterns of educational administration, and consequently education, are at stake. Decisions made now may establish organizational patterns

of long duration. It would be easy to accept a power relationship which appears to offer relief to immediate problems--but it is extremely difficult to control power relationships once they have been adopted. Consequently, we should face the challenge now. We can make it work.

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WHAT IS A SHARED DECISION-MAKING MODEL

What It Is

1. A valid approach to develop participatory democracy.
2. Provides a "hot line" between the Superintendent and classroom by a systematic procedure for identifying and solving problems.
3. Enhances the educational team's recommendations to the Board.
4. A sharing of power.
5. Collective gaining.
6. A mechanism for receiving and sending.
7. Action-oriented with a premium on out-put.
8. A 21st Century approach to educational problem-solving.
9. Unifying.
10. Innovative thrust.

What It Is Not

1. An exercise in insincerity designed to get the mind off adversary relationships and reduce effectiveness of association.
2. A cynical approach to perpetuating a company union.
3. A method to rubber-stamp recommendations.
4. A strategy to reduce or diminish power of any individual group.
5. Conflict confrontation.
6. A vehicle for one-way communication.
7. A set of do-nothing ad hoc committees.
8. A 1930 Labor management model approach using the adversary relationship.
9. Divisive.
10. More of the shopworn approach to problem solving.

WHY DO WE NEED A PROFESSIONAL MODEL FOR SHARED DECISION MAKING

1. The nature of educational problems in "70s requires the best judgments of the entire staff.
2. A network for two-way communication is essential to coping with today's educational problems.
3. All professionals have an obligation to help DISD solve its problems.
4. A professional approach is consistent with tradition for Dallas.
5. The bi-lateral adversary approach denies the professional the opportunity for full participation in the decision-making process.
6. The nature of educational professionalism has evolved to the point that at least 95% of problems to be solved are professional in nature and require professional approach.
7. The present vehicle whereby we get valid grass roots response needs to be perfected.
8. A vehicle is to serve self-interest and needs.
9. The adversary relationship builds distrust and results in loss of confidence.
10. There is a desperate need to prove validity of shared-decision method.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS NOW

1. Develop and demonstrate a personal and professional long-range commitment.
2. Identify the kinds of decisions necessary to establish a rule in the shared-decision making process.
3. Identify behavior needed to implement the shared-decision making process.
4. Assume a leadership role in participatory democracy.
5. Assume more responsibility to diagnose and prescribe for the improvement of personal effectiveness.
6. Determine and implement strategies for securing commitment of professional colleagues to the process.
7. Use of methods known to work in related research.
8. Demonstrate knowledge and use of various motivation techniques.
9. Must develop and teach programs that involve a shared-decision making concept with students.
10. Design procedure for evaluating, modifying, and improving process.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL OFFICE MANAGEMENT STAFF

1. Develop and demonstrate a personal and professional long-range commitment to the concept of a professional model of shared-decision making.
2. Assume the leadership role in determining and implementing strategies for securing commitment of professional co-workers in the process.
3. Understand and utilize the broader participation concept of shared-decision making prior to submission of recommendations by the Executive Team.
4. Identify Central Office Management behavior needed to implement the shared-decision making model.
5. Become cognizant of the functions and purposes of the steering committee.
6. Designate a liaison staff member(s) to design and implement strategies in working with the District Education Council.
7. Design and develop processes and guidelines in determining management prerogatives.
8. Develop more sophisticated and systematic strategies of long-range planning.
9. Develop a mechanism for receiving, reviewing, and assessing the action of the council.
10. Design procedures for evaluating, modifying, and improving the shared-decision making process.

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